

Nowhere to Turn

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Summary: "No one had called her selfish in a very, very long time."

Pre-Jane and Ruggedly Handsome Man have a conversation about the mission.

Nowhere to Turn

\*\*A/N\*\*: It's like clockwork. I finish one pre-series fic, and another idea immediately pops into my head. This one ended up being so, so much longer than the original little vignette I had planned, but I'm really excited about the finished product anyway. Please enjoy, and leave some thoughts if you have them.

\* \* \*

><p>"You're being selfish."<p>

The dark-haired woman looked up at the sound of the bearded man's voice, surprised, for a moment, into silence. No one had called her selfish in a very, very long time. No one had had cause to; no one had had the balls. But this man was one of the few who had the latter and, it appeared, the former as well. Or at least he thought he had the former.

She set aside the drawings she was studying, and braced herself against the table, looking across the room at him as he stepped inside, and shut the door firmly behind him.

"What exactly am I being selfish about?" the woman asked, mildly curious.

"Oscar," the bearded man replied at once, and the woman smiled briefly, shaking her head as she turned back to the drawings spread out before her.

"Interesting," she murmured, as if to herself, as she wrote a little note on one of the sketches. "You're usually fond of making the

argument that it's him who is being selfish about me. Isn't that your go-to complaint?"

"That was before," the bearded man replied, coming to a stop at the opposite edge of the table. He did not smile or play along. He did not look at the drawings between them, the endless sketches. He stared at her. "This is now."

The dark-haired woman crossed her arms over her thin chest, eyeing him as he waited on the other side of the metal table. She was not one accustomed to being challenged, but this man standing across from her, he was one of the few whose opposition she allowed and respected. Usually he had good points.

"Oh? And what's happening now?" The woman cocked her head to the side, surveying him closely. "What's changed? Are you two suddenly bffs?" Her green eyes flickered briefly up to the ceiling, then back down; even her eye-rolls her efficient. "Two months before the drop date, perfect."

The bearded man did not entertain her taunts for even a second. He went straight to business, as she usually did. "You've asked Oscar to be your intermediary in the field. You designated him as your handler."

The dark-haired woman's lips pursed briefly in displeasure, not at the fact, but at the sound of the bearded man saying it aloud. He waited, but she did not reply. She turned back to the drawings as if his statement were not important, as if he were not there.

Others would have left at that point. Others would've known when they were being dismissed.

But he stood, lifting himself to his full six feet—six-one, really, with his boots on—and waited. He stared at her for a length of time that would've made anyone else uncomfortable, would've given anyone else chills. She didn't even flinch under his accusing gaze.

"Have you even stopped to think for one second what that will be like for him? Have you spared a moment to look at this situation, from his point of view?"

"I have looked at this situation from everyone's point of view," the woman answered, switching her focus briefly from the drawings to the man standing across the table from her. The look in her fierce green eyes was clear: Do not speak like you know more than me.

The man crossed his arms, his mouth twitching into a scowl beneath his beard. He would bend to orders, yes, but not to stupidity. Not to denial. "Obviously not," he replied. Before she could say a word, he continued, his voice faster than before, angrier than before: "Think about what you're asking him to do. Think about what it'll do to him. As if losing you isn't hard enough already!"

"He could've said no," the woman cut in defensively, putting down her pen with more force than necessary. It slammed against the drawings atop the steel table with a clang, but neither person flinched. "I told him he could say no!"

The bearded man snorted, half turning away. "Right. Since when has he

ever said no to you? Never. Since day one, he has always been on board with anything and everything you wanted." The bearded man laughed without humor, bringing up a hand to massage his beard, and pull at his chin. "I tell you, that kid would've made would've made a good little husband for you. You sure can pick 'em. Loyal to the end. Like a dog."

The dark-haired woman's eyes narrowed. "What's your point?"

"He isn't strong enough for this, that's my point."

"He's stronger than you think."

"He's weaker than you think. I know you love him, but he isn't cut out for this."

The dark-haired woman shook her head, refusing that claim. "You don't know what he's cut out for. You don't know the things he's seen in combat, the things he's doneâ€" "

"I'm not talking about fucking combat here!" the bearded man shouted, whirling around and shoving his hands against the edge of the table. Even bolted to the floor, it rattled beneath his force. "I don't give a shit what he saw in his jarhead days! This is about you, and what he's going to have to watch you go through, watch you do."

The suggestion of her future actions hung there, unspoken, in the air between them. The dark-haired woman's nose twitched at the possibility, quietly furious, and disgusted at him for bringing it up. How dare he try and make it a reality here, now? Ever? It was sickening.

"His heart isn't weak, either, you know," she got out, but it took her a few seconds, and she no longer sounded as certain as before.

"Maybe not," the bearded man allowed, his voice calmer now, too. "But it is being fractured." He stared at her across the table until she looked up, and met his eye. "How long until it breaks?" he asked. "How long until he breaks? I realize you have the luxury of looking this detail over, because you won't remember, you won't notice once you're gone, butâ€" "

"I have the luxury of looking over nothing!" the woman shouted, slamming a fist so hard on the table that a number of the drawings fluttered in the air, and fell to the floor. "Who do you think you're talking to?" she demanded of the bearded man, pointing at her own chest as she leaned over the table. "I have gone over every step of this plan, every point of this mission, meticulously. For years. This is my life."

"And it won't be yours much longer," the bearded man replied, stoic in the face of her sudden fury. He was one of the few that could take it, without flinching. One of two.

"Once you goâ€!" He shook his head. He might sound sad, if the look in his eyes were not so calculating. "He's going to crack. You've put too much pressure on him and he's going to break. And now you've made it so we all will have to pay the price for it; we all will have to rely on him to get to you. What happens when he can't be relied on

anymore? What do we do then?"

"He's strong. He'll be fine. Stop underestimating him."

"Stop over\_estimating him." The bearded man was nearly pleading now. "Do you really not see that he's still so in love with you he'll do absolutely anything you ask, even if it kills him? I mean, God, he would put a fucking bullet in his skull if you said it would help the mission!"

The woman waved an impatient hand, stepping away from the table.  
"Stop exaggerating. It isn't helping your case."

"I'm not exaggerating!" the bearded man called out, walking around the side of the table to follow after her. "Have you looked at him recently? I mean really looked at him? Two months to go still, and he already looks like a fucking zombie. When we were training the other day, I knocked him flat in six hits. Six. I should not be able to do that. No one should be able to do that!"

When the woman put her back to him, the bearded man sighed, and ran a hand through his hair.

"Lookâ€| I know you see him differently, okay. And I knowâ€"I know you might not mean to, but you're blocking certain things out, things that you don't want to acknowledge, because they're painful, because they make you feel guilty. But you can't do that anymore, not with him. You give him this job, you need to look at him like you look at the rest of us. No sympathy, no free passes, no explanations. He needs to be mission-fit, or he needs to be cut loose. Those are the only two options."

"He isn't getting cut loose," the woman replied.

The bearded man frowned, sighing softly as he stared at her back. She was wearing a dark grey long-sleeved t-shirt, close-fitting, and he could see the muscles in her back clearly through it. He could see how she was hunching forward, curling in on herself. He didn't want to bring it up, not nowâ€"he didn't want to torture herâ€"but she did have to come to terms with certain truths. If she needed them shoved in her face to accept them, so be it.

"He wears that ring you gave back, you know." The bearded man took a slow step forward, and then another. He watched her back stiffen at the mention. "Have you noticed it?" he asked quietly. "I saw it when I laid him out the other day; he had it tucked in under his shirt, but it slipped out when he hit the ground. He's got it on some sort ofâ€""

"Yeah, I know about the necklace," she interrupted softly.

Too softly.

The bearded man opened his mouth to ask how, to ask why and when, but before a sound could come out, it clicked. His eyes shuttered closed.

"Do not tell meâ€|"

"I am not asking for your opinion on the matter," the woman hissed,

turning around to overrule him, but it was no use.

"Jesus fucking Christ," the bearded man spat out, his eyes like fire as they flashed open, and burned into hers. "Do you have no goddamn self-control? No shame?"

The woman raised her voice, marching up to him. "I said I was not asking forâ€" "

"And here I thought you were being selfish just by asking him to be your handler! But NO!!" the bearded man bellowed, screaming in her face. "You're still fucking him, too!"

"Shut yourâ€"!"

"What in the hell is wrong with you? You were supposed to be making a clean break! You gave him the ring backâ€"!"

"And he asked me to stay, okay?" the woman yelled back. "I was getting up to go, and he asked me to stay, andâ€"" All at once her voice broke off, and she buried her face in her hands, rubbing hard at her forehead and cheeks. "Jesus, what was I supposed to do?" she whispered into her hands. "He has two more months before I go. Just two months, andâ€"" She lifted her head from her hands, caught the bearded man's gaze. "How am I supposed to say no when it's the only thing he's asking me for? The only goddamn thingâ€"all he wants is to be with me while he still can, while I'm still here, while I'm still me. How do I say no to that? With everything I'm taking from him?"

"It's simple: you just say no."

The woman's face broke for a second under the bearded man's cold calculation, and even though she knew would have had the same response, the same detachment if it were him in her place, she still resented him for it. In the moment, she hated him for it. He had never liked Oscar, likely never would, and now, hearing him talk about him like this was just too much. On top of everything else, she could not take this.

"This only proves my point, you know," the bearded man added when she turned away. "He isn't strong enough for this. He's holding onto you now like it will keep you with him once the next two months are up. And he's holding onto that ring like it'll still mean something once your mind's gone." He shook his head. "It won't. None of this will mean anything to you. What flickers of memory you might get after you're reborn, they will never amount to what you have now. You might recognize his face, or mine, but you won't feel anything for us. We'll be murky reflections, nothing more. We'll be someone else's people to you.

"So listen to me: don't make this any harder on him. Don't torture him anymore than he's already being tortured. Just cut him offâ€"!"

"I can't cut him off."

"You have to."

"I can't, I can't leave him now, not so soon beforeâ€"!"

"You act like staying with him right up until the last moment will make things easier. It won't. You'll still be gone. Your memories will still be obliterated. You still won't recognize him when he comes to you in a few months' timeâ€|" He bit the inside of his cheek, not wanting to play this card, never wanting to play this card, but also knowing full well it might be one of the few things that might knock some sense into her. If not the ring, then this.

"What if you're already with Weller by the time Oscar comes into play?" Her whole body froze at the mention, but the bearded man did not pause. He could not pause. "Think about what that'll be like from Oscar's perspective. Don't do that to him. Don't make him watch that. Losing you once will be hard enough."

The woman shook her head, short and quick. Almost violently. "Wellerâ€"that's just a contingency plan. That might not even happen."

The bearded man snorted at her denial. She was always like this when it came to Weller, always wanting believe he and she wouldn't come true. "We're branding the guy's name on your back and offering you forward as his Taylor. I give you both three months until you're hopping blissfully into bed together, none the wiser of who you're leaving behind."

The woman's chin shook. With anyone else, she would've yelled Get out; she would've screamed, You aren't allowed to speak to me like that! But he is one of the few that could.

Her "Fuck you," when she managed it, trembled and broke on her lips.

Though the bearded man did not apologize, he at least had the decency to look guilty.

"I know you don't like thinking about it, okay; I know you were never a fan of that avenue of getting things done, butâ€| Come on, return to reality. It's gonna happen. It's inevitable. And if you continue stringing Oscar along like this, you'll be making it all the more horrible for him when it does happen. Break this thing off with him now," the bearded man implored, "and tell him you'll find someone else to be your handler."

"This is hard enough already," the woman whispered. "And you're not making it any easier by shoving it in my face like this."

"Good!" the bearded man shouted, spreading his arms, so sick of all this already. "Good, I don't want to make it easy, I want to make it hard! Because if he won't fight you, I will! Don't make him do this; don't let him do this! It won't be good for any of us."

"What am I supposed to do?" she cried. "I love him! I don't want to leave him, I want to give him some part of me, but there are no options here."

"Don't make him follow after you. That's an option. Don't make him be your handler. Please," the bearded man begged. "Don't do it. Because he will be so good at it, he will be perfect at it, and it

will fucking destroy him in the process." The woman started to open her mouth to protest, but the man pushed past her: "I don't care what you \_think \_will or won't happen with Weller. I've been watching him, too. He still has fucking pictures of that little girl in his apartment. He'll fall for you like a ton of fucking bricks, and you, with no memory, no past, nothing to hold onto but him, you'll do the exact same thing. What's that gonna be like, for Oscar to watch from the outside, huh? What's it gonna be like, for him to have to meet with you in the middle of the night and know that you're going back to \_him \_afterwards?

"I know you made him promises when you took that ring. Don't go back on them now just because you gave it back. Don't make him suffer like this. Do right by him and end this, for good, before you go. Don't leave him with hope. Don't leave him with anything. Just go, and be gone."

The woman was quiet for a long time. He watched as she braced herself against the table and shook. He didn't see any tears fall, but he knew they must be there; even if she was holding them in, they were there.

He gave her time, what little he could. And then he double-checked, because he knew he had to.

"Did you hear me? Do you understand what I'm telling you?"

His voice was gentle, but firm. He didn't risk touching her, didn't risk coming any closer. She was a moment away from collapsing or lashing out, and there was no way to know which way she'd turn until she turned. She was lethal when she lashed out.

"It won't matter," she whispered finally. She sniffed quickly, wiping her face, before looking over at the bearded man. Her eyes were rimmed in red, her face pinched with pain. "It won't matter if I end it or not, or if I refuse to let him be my handler or not, he still won't let go of me. He'll hold on."

"That'll be his choice, then," the bearded man replied quietly. "But you need to give him that option. You need to cut him off so he can cut himself off. If you keep offering yourself to him like thisâ€|" The man with the beard shook his head. "He won't last. He will not hold it together. And we need him."

"I need him, too."

"I know." The bearded man chanced a step forward, a hand on her back. She flinched, but didn't pull away. He rubbed one shoulder blade, then the other. "I know you need him, but you gotta let him go. Hear me?"

The woman didn't respond. She just stood there, braced against the table, and accepted what little comfort the bearded man offered her. She had nothing left to give in return.

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><p><strong>AN\*\*: Thank you for reading. Reviews are life, and it would be very nice to hear some thoughts if you took the time to read.

End  
file.